HERITAGE CONSERVATION PROGRAM

STATUS REPORT AUGUST 1989

The Vancouver Heritage Conservation Program was initiated in 1983 by City Council. The purpose of the program was to develop a comprehensive approach to the conservation of heritage resources in the city. The program is administered by the Heritage Planner who oversees the maintenance of the Heritage Inventory, negotiates and reviews heritage permits and development enquiries, develops policy, and acts as a liaison with the Heritage Advisory Committee. The Vancouver Heritage Advisory Committee is appointed by City Council, and advises on development permit applications for heritage buildings and the development of heritage policy.

The following is a brief outline of the City's heritage management framework, and some of the items the City is presently working on.

WHAT WE HAVE

1. **Heritage Inventory**: Vancouver has one of the most comprehensive city-wide heritage inventories in North America. It includes buildings, monuments, archaeological sites and landscapes.

   A review of the existing inventory is underway to eliminate those buildings which have been altered, or have lost their original context, and to include public nominations and post-war landmark buildings.

2. **"Carrots" or Incentives for Heritage:**

- Zoning By-law Relaxations: Section 3.2.6 of the Zoning and Development By-law permits the relaxation of regulations in order to conserve a building on the Vancouver Heritage Inventory. These relaxations provide the necessary flexibility to accommodate the rehabilitation of heritage buildings which are frequently non-conforming. They may also increase the economic incentive for heritage conservation by permitting some increase in density or floorspace.

- Heritage Density Bonus: A heritage density bonus is available for the preservation of Downtown and West End buildings. This density bonus assists building owners with the cost of heritage building rehabilitation. The amount of density provided is based on the Calculation of Density Bonus formula which is included in the Heritage Policies and Guidelines bulletin available from the Planning Department. This extra density can either be accommodated on the site, or transferred to another site.

- Transfer of Density: Transferring the undeveloped density from a heritage site to another site is another effective tool for heritage conservation. This density transfer is limited to certain use, density, and height areas. Transfer of density regulations are explained in the Transfer of Density Policy and Procedure bulletin available from the Planning Department.

  The use of both the Heritage Density Bonus and Transfer of Density Policy has made it possible to save heritage buildings on prime land in the downtown.

- A "Green Door" Policy for "A" Buildings: Council has adopted a policy to "fast track" permit applications for "A" buildings on the Heritage Inventory. The "green door" offers a quick response to initial inquiries about the feasibility of retaining these buildings, and an expedition of the permit process.

- Heritage Area and Streetscape Study: In 1988, the City undertook a heritage area and streetscape study to identify concentrations of heritage buildings worthy of special attention. Council indicated support for a program to preserve specific streetscapes and areas such as Kitsilano, Strathcona and Grandview-Woodlands. Staff were asked to report on possible streetscapes in post World War I single-family areas. These programs will commence when staff resources are available.

- o Historic Area Review: The City is currently undertaking a complete review of Vancouver's oldest established historic areas, Gastown and Chinatown. The purpose of the review is to solve some of the administrative and jurisdictional issues in these areas, and to develop some conservation standards and design guidelines. The Official Development Plan for Shaughnessy is also currently under review.

- o Public Awareness and Education: The City's heritage award program acknowledges and promotes successful conservation. The City has also produced a number of widely-used walking tours. A plaque program for heritage buildings is underway.

3. **"Sticks" or Controls for Heritage:**

- o Demolition Delay: Section 10.12.4 of the Zoning and Development By-law prohibits the demolition of buildings on the Heritage Inventory until a development permit and a building permit for the new construction are issuable. This "demolition delay" policy provides essential time to negotiate the retention of heritage buildings using the City's heritage incentives policies.

- o Required Calculation of Density Bonus: Council recently amended the "demolition delay" by-law to include the provision that applications to demolish "A" buildings on the Heritage Inventory, which are located in the Downtown and West End, must include a feasibility study illustrating why it is not viable to keep the building using the City's heritage incentives. This ensures that developers at least consider the retention of the City's most significant heritage buildings.

WHAT WE'RE WORKING ON

Financial Incentives: At present, there are no financial incentives to encourage upgrading of heritage buildings. The Gastown-Chinatown Study (described above) will include an exploration of the cost/benefits of property tax incentives for building rehabilitation.

Vancouver City Council is supporting the national lobby for federal income tax incentives for heritage conservation.

A Heritage Foundation: The City does not have the authority to provide outright grants, low interest loans or a revolving fund for heritage projects. A heritage foundation, funded by government and private corporations and individuals, will provide these incentives for conservation as well as encourage investment in the conservation of heritage properties, and their contexts. A Vancouver Heritage Foundation is in the planning stages. A similar program in Victoria has illustrated that even small grants to heritage building owners encourages restoration and designation of heritage buildings.

Conservation Standards: It is necessary to ensure that restoration work is appropriately done, and of lasting quality. The City has been working with the Provincial Heritage Conservation Branch to develop Province-wide conservation standards. This work is almost complete, and will be reported to Council when it is finalized.

A New Conservation Act: The Province is currently rewriting the Heritage Conservation Act to clarify a number of issues, including compensation for designation and protection of building interiors. It is anticipated that the new Act will be before the Legislature in the Spring of 1991.

Alternate Historic Building Code: The City of Vancouver Building By-law includes a number of code equivalencies (alternative means of meeting life safety requirements) for heritage buildings. The Heritage Conservation Branch has been following the California example and is developing an alternate code for heritage buildings. This will go beyond the City's code equivalencies in evaluating the degree of risk associated with individual buildings, and the inherent strengths in each structure. Although this will take some time to put in place, it is an important step in making the upgrading of heritage more viable.

HOW WE'RE DOING

Public interest in the City's heritage is very high, resulting in an average of 15 inquiries per day. In addition to policy development and preliminary negotiations on property development, between 25 and 30 heritage related development and building permits are processed each month.

Since the Heritage Program began in 1984, 28 buildings have been designated for a total of 85 designated buildings in the city. These range from the Model and Normal Schools, Tellier Tower at 16 E. Hastings, Firehall No. 6, the apartment building at 6th and Cypress, workers' cottages in Strathcona, and a number of Park Board buildings. (A complete list of designated buildings is available from the Planning Department). Numerous other buildings listed on the Heritage Inventory, including many of those acknowledged by the approximately ten heritage awards the City grants every year, have been rehabilitated and adaptively re-used.

Since the evaluation of the buildings on the Inventory was completed at the end of 1985, 96 demolitions have occurred. This represents less than 3% of the inventory (2,450 buildings). The majority of these demolitions were located in "outright" residential zones where existing heritage incentives have less effect. The development of a heritage foundation and special heritage conservation areas will help increase the number of heritage buildings which are restored.

For further information about the Heritage Conservation Program, please call 873-7056.